

## **Michael Crichton's Mark on the Science Fiction World**

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Dinosaurs from the Jurassic period roam the earth in the 1900s, a group of molecule-sized robots disintegrate everything in their path, and a group of archaeologists return to the Middle Ages to find their professor and bring him back. These are several of the many stories Michael Crichton has created. He has written more than ten New York Times science fiction bestsellers. He has been able to create diseases, time machines, and whole worlds from his extensive medical background and his travels to many destinations in the world. Reviewers and critics like to point out that his works explore contemporary science and the ethical challenges that result through “fast paced adventure [and] genuine intellectual puzzles.”

Born on October 23, 1942, in Chicago, Illinois, Crichton was not thought of as a writer in school and did not show a great interest in writing. He began studying anthropology at Harvard. He graduated from medical school in 1969. To pay his tuition, he began writing The Andromeda Strain. The book sold so well that Crichton eventually gave up medicine, never becoming a licensed doctor, and went on to travel around the world, writing on trains, planes, and other vehicles as he went. He wrote fourteen novels, including Jurassic Park, Lost World, and Timeline. All were made into major motion pictures, along with three others. He wrote a number of nonfiction books. His works have been translated into twenty-four languages. Crichton is also famous as a screenwriter and movie director. His hit TV show E.R. won eight Emmys and a George

Foster Peabody Award, and Crichton won two writers' awards for A Case of Need and The Great Train Robbery.

In The Andromeda Strain, inspired by H. G. Well's War of the Worlds, there is an unknown cause for the death of almost a whole town. The plot unfolds around a team of scientists who discover and must kill patches of deadly bacteria on a satellite returning from space. The patches are called "The Andromeda Strain." Crichton's work with diseases most likely helped him invent this disease, its symptoms, and its antidote.

Michael Crichton's medical background greatly influenced his following work as well. Prey, Jurassic Park, and other early novels begin with medical emergencies, usually fatal. For example, in Jurassic Park, the conflict immediately develops from basic medical references after a patient is rushed into the emergency room with a large loss of blood from some sort of bite. The doctor's point of view reveals that it is no "mechanical trauma. It just didn't look right. No soil contamination of the wound site, and no crush-injury component. Mechanical trauma of any sort. . . almost always had some component of crushing." Also, early in his novel, Prey, a father frantically rushes his baby, covered in rashes, into an emergency room. It is pointed out that "By now Amanda's entire body was bright, angry red. She looked as if she had been parboiled." Later, when the father asks if this is the result of an infection, the doctor replies, "It's not an infection. . . White cell counts all normal, protein fractions normal. She's got no immune mobilization at all." He goes on to note many different consultations to figure out what is wrong with the nine month old. Luckily she survives, the rash mysteriously disappearing.

Another strong occurrence of medical (and science) concepts in Jurassic Park is that of DNA reconstruction. Knowing the structure of DNA is an important factor in

serious medical procedures. Faulty DNA can result in many physical and mental defects, which would have to be diagnosed by a doctor, after either receiving results from a laboratory or looking at the chromosomes. Also, knowing that frog DNA (stuck in a mosquito that was buried in tree sap and fossilized until today) could fill in empty spots in the old dinosaur's DNA is crucial for reconstruction to produce the dinosaurs that roamed Isla Nublar in Jurassic Park, and Isla Sonor in Lost World.

The television series "E.R." names the influence of Crichton's medical background. Each episode portrays various medical emergencies that actually happened to him or other physicians. Indeed, the pilot was "just a string of experiences that had happened to me," including cases of gun shot wounds, carbon monoxide poisoning, and car crashes.

Travel influenced Crichton's work in another significant way. According to Gina Macdonald, "[his] exotic settings were inspired by his travels." In Congo, inspired by King Solomon's Mines by Sir Henry Rider Haggard, Crichton himself speaks of his preparation for writing the book: "To prepare for writing the book, I planned to go to Africa to see gorillas on the slopes of the Virunga Volcano chain in [East] Congo. . . "

According to his autobiography Travels, Crichton visited Tahiti, New Guinea, the American desert, and Africa. In all of these places he encountered unusual people, animals, and events. In Tahiti, he swam with sharks, in New Guinea he met painted tribesmen, in Africa he looked straight into the eyes of an elephant in the middle of the night, and in an American desert, he encountered the paranormal. These and other travel adventures set off various ideas for books.

Jurassic Park and Lost World have settings on deserted islands with dewy jungles and long stretches of beaches, reminiscent of what Crichton saw in Tahiti. The novel Prey opens with a desert-like setting in Nevada and Arizona. It is questionable if the setting would have been quite as realistic were it not for Crichton's actual travels to those places.

Michael Crichton's novels will be remembered as some of the greatest science fiction novels that have inspired many other writers to follow his invention of the "techno-thriller." His talent in many areas has given him the ability to make people "think about topics of concern in our day to day culture," according to one critic. He has traveled all over the world, and gone from a degree in medicine to ten bestsellers and more than six different kinds of awards. His realistic portrayal of a technological future has made his books all the more clever and interesting. This Illinois author's work will be well-known for many years to come. [From Andromeda Strain, [www.crichton-official.com](http://www.crichton-official.com) (Oct. 28, 2005); Congo, [www.crichton-official.com](http://www.crichton-official.com) (Oct. 28, 2005); Cliff Corder and Kyle Browning. "Michael Crichton," [www.globalnets.com](http://www.globalnets.com) (Oct. 2 and 13, 2005); Michael Crichton. Jurassic Park; Michael Crichton. Lost World; Michael Crichton. Prey; Lost World, [www.crichton-official.com](http://www.crichton-official.com) (Oct. 28, 2005); Gina Macdonald. "Michael Crichton: Overview," Contemporary Popular Writers; "Michael Crichton: You Ask the Questions," [www.crichton-official.com](http://www.crichton-official.com) (Oct. 28, 2005); Prey, [www.crichton-official.com](http://www.crichton-official.com) (Oct. 28, 2005); and Travels, [www.crichton-official.com](http://www.crichton-official.com) (Oct. 28, 2005).]